



### Chairman's Column



**Chairman Bob Filner**

*I applaud President Obama's budget request for the Department of Veterans Affairs. After 16 years on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, I am very encouraged that this outline is consistent with the recommendations made by the veterans' groups who co-author the Independent Budget. This has never happened in the 23-year history of the IB! The Obama budget calls for the biggest increase for veterans programs ever requested by an Administration.*

*The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs is committed to assisting the VA in its goal of becoming a model 21st Century organization. The Committee shares the Administration's commitment to improving health care for all veterans, increasing access to mental health services, addressing and preventing homelessness among veterans, and honoring the veterans of previous generations. I am confident that under the leadership of VA Secretary Shinseki, the needs of veterans will be the top priority.*

# House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

**Chairman Bob Filner**

## **111th Congress: First Quarter Update**

### **Increases in Veterans Funding**

#### ***FY 2010 Budget Resolution***

- The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs supports the President's budget request and recommended an additional \$800 million above the Administration proposal. The recommendation was adopted by the House Budget Committee and passed by the House.
- H.Con.Res. 85, The House Budget Resolution, provides for a \$5.5 billion increase over fiscal year 2009, an increase of 11.5% for veterans health care and other programs. This budget increase builds upon the success of the 110th Congress when Democrats added \$16.3 billion to the VA budget.

#### ***The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (P.L. 111-5)***

- Congressional approval of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is the first major step in rebuilding our country's economy, while also honoring our veterans.
- The bill provides a \$1.4 billion increase for the Department of Veterans for maintenance at VA medical facilities, construction of veterans' extended care facilities, and veteran cemetery repairs. The bill also provides economic stimulus payments of \$250 to disabled veterans receiving VA compensation or pension.

### **Veteran's Outreach**

- The Committee held a Roundtable with more than 34 veterans service organizations and military associations to discuss their legislative priorities for the 111th Congress.
- The House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees met in Joint Session 4 times to receive the legislative agendas of 17 veterans service organizations.

## Legislative Highlights

### **H.R. 1377 – Emergency Care Eligibility Expansion**

Currently, veterans are not reimbursed for medical costs when they receive emergency care from non-VA medical facilities if they have insurance that pays either full or a portion of the emergency care. In effect, veterans with third-party insurance are penalized and required to pay the remaining amount not covered by insurance. H.R. 1377 is a common sense bill that clarifies the reimbursement responsibilities of the VA, so veterans can focus on their recovery, instead of being overburdened with financial concerns. *(Passed by the House of Representatives)*

### **H.R. 1171 – Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program Reauthorization Act of 2009**

H.R. 1171 is an important step to ensuring that the VA is prepared to provide comprehensive services to prevent veteran homelessness. This bill reauthorizes the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program for fiscal years 2010 through 2014 and includes an additional \$10 million to provide dedicated services for homeless women veterans and homeless veterans with children. Grants are available to provide job training, counseling, placement services, and child care services to expedite the reintegration of veterans into the labor force. *(Passed by the House of Representatives)*

### **H.R. 1513 – The Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2009**

H.R. 1513 provides a cost-of-living adjustment for veterans and is one of the most important bills Congress passes each year. This bill guarantees that those who have sacrificed so much for this country receive benefits and services that keep pace with inflation and their needs. *(Passed by the House of Representatives)*

### **H.R. 1388 – The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act**

The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act encourages a renewed spirit of national service and community volunteerism by establishing a Veterans Corp program designed to help veterans meet the needs of their fellow service members. This volunteer program serves the needs of veterans and members of the Armed Forces, and creates opportunities for veterans to continue serving their country through education, mentoring, and job training for fellow veterans. *(Passed by Congress and sent to President Obama for signature)*

## VA Oversight: Solutions for Veterans & Accountability for Americans

The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs conducted rigorous oversight of various VA operations to improve services for veterans, as well as provide accountability for the American taxpayer. The Committee has held a series of oversight hearings to measure program results, end waste, and combat mismanagement.

- The Committee continues to monitor VA's planning and progress in implementing the new G.I. Bill requirements which are expected to go into effect on August 1, 2009.
- The Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations held a hearing that focused on the lack of action by the Department of Defense and VA to establish the Vision Center of Excellence, a program that was funded in early 2008.
- The Committee addressed recent reports of misdated claims and shredded documents at the Veterans Benefits Administration, and is committed to working with Secretary Shinseki on fixing the disability claims process.